

OBP Mainland Release Trial Program 2022

Two Week Update – 26 May 2022

DELWP, Zoos Victoria, Moonlit Sanctuary, BirdLife Australia, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, CCMA, the Tasmanian Government and Adelaide Zoo are partnering to deliver a Mainland Release Trial in Victoria, with the hope of once again having flocks of OBPs in our coastal habitats.

This year the release program is slightly different, with releases staggered over May and a greater focus on the trialling of new tracking technology and re-call training.

Just over two weeks ago the first group of Orange-bellied Parrots (OBPs) prepared for Mainland Release were released, with the second group being released in recent days.

Lake Connewarre

This year we have undertaken two releases at Lake Connewarre, on the Bellarine Peninsula. The first 12 birds were released on May 9th. These birds were sourced from NRE Tasmania and Adelaide Zoo and spent seven days in on-site aviaries before release.



Birds exiting the Lake Connewarre release aviary. Image Sarah Agterhuis.

Most of the first group of birds have remained in the area (11/12 detected in the area two weeks post release) and most have been observed regularly near the aviaries. They are making use of a nearby shelterbelt of Melaleuca and have been observed foraging on Austral Seablite and Sea Barley Grass in the adjacent saltmarsh.

Unfortunately, the partial remains of one released bird were recovered on May 16th. The bird had been predated by a bird of prey (possibly a Hobby).

Over the weekend, three individuals from this first release group were observed feeding on Austral seablite in a flock of 8, which also included 4 natural migrant juveniles, 1 natural migrant adult and a male released at the site in 2021. Observing this mixed flock, feeding together on a traditional OBP food plant, has been a highlight for the field team.

The second release group comprised of 8 birds from NRE Tasmania. These birds were released on May 23rd, after spending 6 days in the on-site aviaries.



A primary objective of these releases is to trial the effectiveness of a fixed-receiver-station tracking system. Five receiver stations have been positioned in the release area (about 1.5-2.0 kms apart), and each of the 20 released birds were fitted with a 0.7g coded VHF transmitter mounted on the base of their tail. This should allow us to detect the birds while they remain in the area for up to two months (or until the tag drops off). We also plan to undertake some detection range trials using transmitters positioned at known locations and on drones.

Fixed Receiver station, Lake Connewarre. Photo: Sarah Agterhuis

In addition to these tracking activities, monitoring has identified five wild migrants that have been seen at this site:

- Silver Black S, a wild adult female, first observed with some Blue-winged Parrots on April 4.
- Silver Green E, a wild adult male, first observed with Blue E Blue (a 2021 mainland release male) on April 14.
- Orange G Black, a juvenile female bred at Healesville Sanctuary, and released in early 2022 at Melaleuca in SW Tasmania. She was first observed on April 25 with Blue E Blue and Silver Green E.
- Red Gold J, a wild-born juvenile male, first observed with a flock of 15-20 Blue-winged Parrots on May 10.
- Red Gold D, a wild-born juvenile female, first observed feeding on Austral Seablite and Barley-grass on May 15.
- Black T Black, a juvenile male bred at NRE, and released in early 2022 at Melaleuca in SW Tasmania, first observed on May 18 feeding with migrants Red Gold D and Red Gold J.

In addition, Blue E Blue, an adult male from the group released at Lake Connewarre in 2021 was first seen this year on April 14 with wild adult male Silver Green E. This is the first time he had been seen since late July 2021.

We hope that birds from the second release group join birds from the previous release and the natural migrants to create a large flock. It is over 20 years since a flock of 15 or more OBPs have been recorded in their non-breeding range.

North Western Port Bay

Unfortunately, this year's planned OBP release at north Western Port Bay has been cancelled. This decision was reached by the Mainland Release Project Team, with the welfare of the birds being front of mind. Several birds in the release group developed a health condition that rendered them unsuitable for release this autumn. The birds are currently receiving treatment following expert veterinary advice and are expected to make a full recovery.

Prior to the planned release, re-call training had been in progress for 10 weeks, in three different aviaries. The addition of new feeding stations and a visual cue (paired with the same aural cue from previous years) provided some very encouraging preliminary results and will be valuable information for the planning of any future training and release activities.



Birds at feeding station used during recall training. Photo: Moonlit Sanctuary.

Further release plans for this year

In addition to the tracking trials currently underway at Lake Connearre, we are also undertaking further captive trials of satellite transmitters. Four birds have been fitted with satellite transmitters at Werribee Open Range Zoo and may be released within the next month or so, if all indications suggest these birds have adjusted well to wearing these transmitters. They would most likely be released at either the Western Treatment Plant or Lake Connearre.

DELWP, Zoos Victoria and Moonlit Sanctuary are major partners in the project in 2022, working with BirdLife Australia, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, CCMA, and private landholders to prepare the release sites and monitor the birds.

Birds for release have been supplied by Tasmania's Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Moonlit Sanctuary and Adelaide Zoo.

This project is supported by CCMA, through funding from the Australian Government's National Landcare Program, the Victorian Government's Icon Species Program, Zoos Victoria and Moonlit Sanctuary.

We are encouraging all public sightings of OBPs in Victoria to be reported to OBP.Release@delwp.vic.gov.au.

Social media updates are being shared by Moonlit Sanctuary, Zoos Victoria and DELWP this season – so keep an eye out on each of these platforms. Our next detailed progress update is due in two weeks.